



# FIJI



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**STATEMENT BY MS. ASENACA ULUIVITI,  
SECOND SECRETARY,  
PERMANENT MISSION OF FIJI TO THE UNITED NATIONS,  
DURING THE FIRST SESSION OF THE  
PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES  
21 MAY 2002, UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK**

Mr. Chairman,

Fiji congratulates you and your bureau on your election to lead this inaugural session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Fiji extends its warm greetings also to the 16 'indigenous experts', who will serve in their individual capacities over the next three years. We are confident that collectively you will break new grounds to advance what have been many long years of indigenous struggles in the international arena. The expectations of your national and regional constituencies, in this regard, are immense.

The Forum presents a new and refreshing opportunity to inject into the UN system of global governance 'old and organic ways of knowing'. As an ECOSOC member, Fiji looks forward to experiencing this new vigour through the Forum in giving advice and making recommendations to the Council on economic and social development, culture, human rights, the environment, education and health. In addition, the Forum is expected to raise awareness, promote the integration and coordination of activities relating to indigenous issues within the United Nations system. Disseminating correct information on indigenous issues would serve to dispel unfounded fears, correct entrenched injustices and build the needed respect and understanding for and including the real issues, facing indigenous and tribal peoples. This Forum will bring to the international community and the UN family of nations the positive optimism which has long sustained indigenous cultures. In particular, this is a significant point of departure for this Forum as the UN organisation embarks on shifting its goals from peacekeeping towards a culture of conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding.

Mr. Chairman,

We challenge the Forum to aid the UN family in finding the needed paradigms to assist this philosophical shift. Traditional knowledge, methods and spirits have long been our sustaining forces over time. They rise again today to reinforce our creative search for lasting solutions.

Mr. Chairman,

This inaugural session of the Forum is auspicious also for its close proximity to the triumphs of indigenous Timorese peoples over their new found freedom. Fiji recognises their determination and congratulates the people of East Timor as they count the days to gaining self-determination and independence on Monday. The United Nations is proud of its role in this transformation. East Timor will soon be delisted from the list of remaining territories in the Decolonisation Committee. We can be confident, that with the Forum's addition to this international family, more such successful developments are in store for us, especially as we approach the end of the Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and embark on the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Decolonisation.

Mr. Chairman,

The Forum mandate is broader, comprehensive and all-encompassing. It can be the leverage for the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples to hasten its work programme and to assist the Special Rapporteur, Madame Erica Daez, in her work. At the close of this first session there is time and opportunity to incorporate prominent issues voiced by the many indigenous peoples gathered here into the preparatory process to, and at the actual August 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa.

These expectations are a tall order perhaps for a fledgling body entrusted with such considerable terms of reference and yet dependant on donor funding assistance. We acknowledge the assistance of donor countries to the Trust funds making possible the huge representation of indigenous peoples here this week. However, Fiji reiterates its earlier call for direct budgetary allocation in the UN system for the Forum, if it is to deliver on its tasks on the UN expectation to mainstream the indigenous agenda.

Mr. Chairman,

To conclude, like gender and children, the indigenous dimension is a cross-cutting factor in the array of issues for policy development at national, regional and international governance. Therefore, we wish to see the political commitment, evident in the establishment of this Forum to be sustained by budgetary and infrastructural support systems. In that connection, we are hopeful for the prospects for a secretariat for the Forum in the near future.

I thank you.